

A Study of Adjustment Level of Adolescents from Foster Home and Biological Families

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ABSTRACT The present study assessed and compared the adjustment level of adolescents from foster home and biological nuclear families. SOS Children's Village was the purposively selected foster home. The sample for the present study comprised of in total 90 respondents: forty five (45) 14-18 year old adolescents from SOS Bhimtal and an equivalent number of adolescents from biological nuclear families of Bhimtal, itself. Adjustment level of the respondents was assessed using a standardized adjustment inventory. In the present study, it was seen that girls from both the family settings exhibited higher level of adjustment in all the domains than boys. Besides this, majority of the respondents from both the family settings were found to be average or above in all the domains of adjustment. However, at the same point, approximately 25% of the study population was seen to be having unsatisfactory adjustment level, as well. It was also seen that except on the educational adjustment component, respondents from biological nuclear families were significantly more socially, emotionally and compositely adjusted than their counterparts.

INTRODUCTION

Life of a person is a beautiful gift awarded to him by the almighty God and with this life starts the process of growth, development and learning. Although the rate of growth, development and learning may vary throughout the lifespan but it continues to influence human beings at every stage of life, right from conception till birth, infancy, childhood and extending throughout adulthood till old age. However, adolescence is a period when this growth, development as well as learning are believed to be at its pinnacle since it's the period of transition of a child into an adult.

According to Peterson (1988), adolescence is the phase of life beginning in biology and ending in society. It means during the adolescent phase individuals have many different psychological and social developmental tasks to fulfil like striving for a separation from parents and family; coping with bodily changes; developing their own norm- and value-system; intensifying their contacts with the peers and increase their financial and vocational skills. Thus, adolescence is a period of dramatic challenge,

one requiring adjustment to changes in the self, in the family and in the peer group.

Adjustment, in psychology, refers to the behavioural process by which humans and other animals maintain equilibrium among their various needs or between their needs and the obstacles of their environments. Bier (2008) stated that adjustment is a process of altering behaviour to reach a harmonious relationship with the environment. It is a process of change and search by an individual for some level of balance or acceptance with the environment, others, or oneself.

Irrefutably, a happy home or healthy family acts as a foremost base in facilitating the attainment of this harmony or balance in an individual's/adolescent's life. Family is an imperative part of everyone's life. How we behave and what we become in life is very much dependent on our family experiences or home environment. Deepshikha and Bahnot (2011) examined the role of family environment on socio-emotional adjustment of adolescent girls and found that all the eight family environment factors, viz. cohesion, expressiveness conflict, acceptance and caring, independence, active-recreational orientation, organization and control together showed significant role in socio-emotional and educational adjustment of adolescent girls.

Thus, family provides the most intimate context for adolescents to develop strong adjustment patterns. But, it is really unfortunate that due to certain reasons many people in this world are

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deprived of the privilege of enjoying the fruits of these precious family bonds or loving home environment. In an attempt to provide home/family to such orphans and destitute children Foster Homes have been set up.

Extensive review of literature for the present study showed that numerous studies have been conducted so far on comparison between the adolescents from foster homes with those from residential care, orphanage and group homes on various issues but none focused on comparison between the adolescents from foster home with those from biological nuclear families on adjustment level and pattern.

Objectives

Thus, the present study was undertaken with the following objectives:

1. To assess the adjustment level of adolescents being reared up in two different sort of family settings, that is, the natural/biological family- where an adolescent lives with his/her birth parents and a foster home- where a destitute/orphan adolescent lives with his/her foster parents. The matter of concern more specifically was to find out that if an orphan/destitute is brought up in a foster home where all his basic needs of love and belongingness; safety and security; food; clothing etc. are being met satisfactorily than does any difference exists in the adjustment level and pattern of these adolescents with the one who are being reared up in their natural/biological nuclear family.
2. To compare the adjustment level of adolescents from same family type across gender.

METHODOLOGY

Locale

In India, at present, quite a few per cent of foster homes are running. However, among those SOS Children's Village was purposively chosen for the present study because of its unique concept and structure of foster home. SOS village consists of fully furnished houses situated nearby to one another. In each house, there's a woman as a motherly figure who provides care and nurturance to a group of children of varied ages. These women are specially interviewed

and trained before being appointed in the village as mothers. In case of report of any sort of harsh or unkind behavior by them, they are immediately rusticated from the organization. Thus, in SOS Children's village inmates get a loving and caring environment as in any biological family. Out of the numerous branches of SOS all over the country, SOS Bhimtal was randomly selected for the present study. The majority of the inmates of SOS Village, Bhimtal as well as the local children of Bhimtal study in Hermann Gmeiner School, a constituent body of the SOS Children's Village. Thus, this school was used as a platform to draw respondents for the present study conducted in the year 2012.

Sample

The respondents for the first sample, that is adolescents from foster home were selected by census method. The entire population of SOS Bhimtal's 14-18 year old adolescents studying in Hermann Gmeiner School (45) was selected as respondents for the said sample. On the other hand, equivalent per cent (45) of respondents for the second sample was picked up using random sampling method from Hermann Gmeiner School, itself.

Tools

The research instrument employed for assessing the adjustment level of respondents was Adjustment Inventory for School Students standardised by A.K.P Sinha and R.P. Singh (2007) for the Indian population. This inventory is meant for assessing the adjustment level of 14 to 18 years old in three domains: Emotional, Social and Educational. It consists of 60 items, totally objective in nature and demanding response in terms of yes and no. For any item indicative of adjustment, 0 is given; otherwise a score of 1 is awarded. The total score on the tool indicated the general adjustment status of the respondent.

Procedure

The respondents were randomly approached in the foster home and school and the purpose of the study was made clear to them. They were requested to give honest responses and were assured that their identity would be kept confi-

dential and information provided by them would be used exclusively for the purpose of research work. The distributed questionnaire approach was used to collect information from the respondents. Each sample student was given the questionnaire individually and was asked to fill out the questionnaire under the supervision of the researcher.

Data Analysis

The data obtained was analyzed using the statistical tools like arithmetic mean, t- test and Z-test. Arithmetic Mean was calculated to sum up the characteristics (adjustment) of the whole group of respondents from foster home and biological nuclear families in figures. t-test and Z-test were used to study the statistical difference in the mean scores of foster home and biological nuclear families' respondents on adjustment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 clearly shows that fairly more per cent of girls (46.43%) than boys (17.65%) from foster home were found to be good and more boys (17.65%) than girls (10.71%) were observed to be excellent on the component of emotional adjustment. Similar was the case with respondents from biological nuclear families. Appreciably more girls (68.75%) than boys (37.93%) were observed to be good on emotional adjustment whereas, more per cent of boys (34.48%) than girls (18.75%) were found to be excellent. Analysis across type of family showed that comparatively more respondents from biological nuclear families (28.88%) than foster home respondents (13.33%) were excellent in social adjustment. Contrasting with emotional adjustment, more boys (17.65%) than girls (14.29%) from foster home whereas, substantially more girls (50%) than boys (34.48%) from biological nuclear families were noticed to be good on social adjustment.

Besides this, 11.76% boys and none of the girl from foster home and likewise 3.44% boys and none of the girl from biological nuclear families were reported to be excellent on this component of adjustment. Similar to emotional adjustment, more per cent of respondents from biological nuclear families was observed to be good and average (40.00% each) as compared to the foster home respondents (15.56% good,

33.33% average) on social component of adjustment as well. On the educational component of adjustment, nearly equal per cent of girls (14.29%) and boys (17.65%) from foster home were found to be good whereas, comparatively more boys (52.94%) than girls (14.29%) were reported to be average. Among biological nuclear families' respondents also, similar per cent of girls (43.75%) and boys (37.93%) were observed to be excellent.

Across type of family, it was interestingly seen that fairly more per cent (40.00%) of biological nuclear families' respondents than foster home respondents (15.55%) were noticed to be excellent on educational adjustment whereas more per cent (31.11%) of the foster home respondents than their counterpart (17.77%) were recognized to be good. It was gratifying to notice that none of the respondents from foster home were reported to be very unsatisfactory. However, little percentage of biological nuclear families' respondents (6.66%) was observed to be very unsatisfactory.

A glance of composite adjustment reveals that more per cent (32.14%) of the girls from foster home than boys (17.65%) were good on adjustment. Similarly, reasonably more biological nuclear family girls (75%) than boys (51.72%) were reported to be good on adjustment. Analysis across type of family clearly showed that more per cent of respondents from biological nuclear families (60.00%) was good on adjustment as compared to foster home respondents (26.67%). Besides this, none of the respondents from biological nuclear families but very little proportion of foster home respondents (2.22%) was found to be at very unsatisfactory level of adjustment.

It can be clearly seen from the Table 2 that no significant difference existed in the emotional, social, educational and overall adjustment of the respondents across gender irrespective of the type of family they belonged.

This finding of the present study is in line as well as contrast with few earlier researches in the related area. Like, Dutta et al. (1998) reported that no significant difference exists between boys and girls in the areas of social adjustment whereas, on the emotional component of adjustment, Larson and Asmussen (1991) revealed that girls tend to experience more negative emotions within peer contexts than do boys. In case of educational adjustment, Gibb et al. (2008) reported that there is a small but perva-

Table 1: Distribution pattern of the respondents from foster home and biological nuclear families on adjustment across gender and type of family

Components of adjustment	Level of adjustment	Score range (0-32)		Foster home ($n_1=45$)				Biological nuclear family ($n_2=45$)				Total sample ($n=90$)					
		Girls	Boys	Girls ($n_{1g}=28$)		Boys ($n_{1b}=17$)		Girls ($n_{2g}=29$)		Boys ($n_{2b}=16$)		Total ($n_2=45$)	Total ($n_2=45$)				
				n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%						
Emotional	Excellent	0-1	0-1	3	10.71	3	17.65	6	13.33	3	18.75	10	34.48	13	28.88	19	21.11
	Good	2-5	2-4	13	46.43	3	17.65	16	35.55	11	68.75	11	37.93	22	48.88	38	84.44
	Average	6-7	5-7	3	10.71	5	29.41	8	17.77	0	0	4	13.79	4	8.88	12	13.33
	Unsatisfactory	8-10	8-10	6	21.43	5	29.41	11	24.44	0	0	2	6.89	2	4.44	13	14.44
	Very unsatisfactory	11-20	11-20	3	10.71	1	5.882	4	8.88	2	12.5	2	6.89	4	8.88	8	8.88
Social	Excellent	0-2	0-2	0	0	2	11.76	2	4.444	0	0	1	3.44	1	2.22	3	3.33
	Good	3-5	3-4	4	14.29	3	17.65	7	15.56	8	50	10	34.48	18	40.00	25	27.78
	Average	6-7	5-7	10	35.71	5	29.41	15	33.33	4	25	14	48.28	18	40.00	33	36.67
	Unsatisfactory	8-10	8-10	10	35.71	3	17.65	13	28.89	4	25	2	6.89	6	13.33	19	21.11
	Very unsatisfactory	11-20	11-20	4	14.29	4	23.53	8	17.78	0	0	2	6.89	2	4.44	10	11.11
Educational	Excellent	0-2	0-2	4	14.29	3	17.65	7	15.55	7	43.75	11	37.93	18	40.00	36	40.00
	Good	3-4	3-4	10	35.71	4	23.53	14	31.11	1	6.25	7	24.14	8	17.77	22	24.44
	Average	5-7	5-7	9	32.14	9	52.94	18	40.00	6	37.5	7	24.14	13	28.88	20	22.22
	Unsatisfactory	8-10	8-10	5	17.86	1	5.882	6	13.33	0	0	3	10.34	3	6.66	9	10.00
	Very unsatisfactory	11-20	11-20	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	12.5	1	3.44	3	6.66	3	3.33
Composite Adjustment	Excellent	0-5	0-5	0	0	1	5.882	1	2.22	0	0	3	10.34	3	6.667	4	4.44
	Good	6-14	6-12	9	32.14	3	17.65	12	26.67	12	75	15	51.72	27	60	39	43.33
	Average	15-22	13-21	9	32.14	6	35.29	15	33.33	2	12.5	6	20.69	8	17.78	23	25.56
	Unsatisfactory	23-31	22-30	9	32.14	7	41.18	16	35.56	2	12.5	5	17.24	7	15.56	23	25.56
	Very Unsatisfactory	32-60	31-60	1	3.571	0	0	1	2.22	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1.11

Table 2: Comparison of adjustment in the respondents from foster home and biological nuclear families across gender

Components of adjustment	Foster home ($n_1=45$)					Biological nuclear family ($n_2=45$)				
	Girls ($n_{1a}=28$)		Boys ($n_{1b}=17$)		t-calculated	Girls ($n_{2a}=16$)		Boys ($n_{2b}=29$)		t-calculated
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
Emotional	5.89	4.23	5.86	3.95	0.02	3.56	3.46	3.34	3.53	0.20
Social	7.71	2.77	7.31	3.09	0.44	5.93	1.80	5.31	2.62	0.93
Educational	4.92	2.37	4.88	2.23	0.06	4.06	3.37	4.27	2.96	0.21
Composite adjustment	18.53	7.31	18.06	7.24	0.21	12.68	6.13	12.51	6.68	0.08

Note: 1. Table value for $t = 1.96$ 2. Lower the score, higher the adjustment

sive tendency for females to score better than males on standardized tests and to achieve more school and post-school qualifications.

A close perusal of Table 3 shows that except on the educational adjustment component, significant differences existed in the emotional, social as well as overall adjustment of the respondents with respect to their type of family. Respondents from foster home were found to be significantly less emotionally adjusting ($Z=3.11$, $p<0.05$) than their counterparts. One probable reason behind it may be as reported by Joseph (1996) that foster care can injure child's emotional development and can lead to negative development outcomes due to inconsistent nurturing and maternal contact.

Just like on the emotional component of adjustment, respondents from foster home were observed to be significantly less socially adjusting ($Z=3.10$, $P<0.05$) than those from the biological nuclear families. Quinton et al. (1986) stated that these problems may exist for former foster children in forming stable cohabiting situations, in parenting and in establishing integrated social relationships in their community.

Contrary to above, no significant difference was observed in the educational adjustment of respondents across their type of family. However, this finding is in contrast with that of Zetlin and Weinberg (2004) who reported that chil-

dren in foster care face many educational obstacles because of frequent moves. It may be stated that since no such condition exists for the respondents being reared in SOS hence, educational adjustment among respondents from foster home was at par with those from biological nuclear families. An overview of the overall adjustment of respondents from foster home and biological nuclear families showed that respondents from biological nuclear families were significantly better adjusted ($Z=3.80$, $P<0.05$) than their counterpart. According to Jones and Morris (2012) also, foster care children are more likely to experience adjustment and behavior problems due to earlier distressful life experiences.

CONCLUSION

It is really heart-warming to notice that in order to work for the welfare and safety of vulnerable orphan and destitute children and adolescents, numerous quality foster homes are being set up in different regions of our country. But unfortunately, inspite of receiving the superior quality care and nurturance in foster homes like SOS it is very difficult for these sensitive adolescents to get rid of the earlier distressful life experiences. These early experiences somehow get embedded in the psyche of ado-

Table 3: Comparison of adjustment in the respondents from foster home and biological nuclear families across type of family

Components of adjustment	Foster home ($n_1=45$)		Biological nuclear family ($n_2=45$)		Z calculated
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
Emotional	5.86	3.95	3.42	3.47	3.11*
Social	7.31	3.09	5.53	2.36	3.10*
Educational	4.88	2.23	4.2	3.07	1.20
Composite adjustment	18.06	7.24	12.57	6.42	3.80*

Note: 1. Table value for $Z = 1.96$ 2. *stands for significant at 0.05 level 3. Lower the score, higher the adjustment

lescents and even after receiving a good quality substitute to natural home, they face difficulty in forming stable cohabiting situations and establishing integrated social relationships in their community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Some more studies need to be conducted to substantiate the findings of the present study. The studies need to assess the quality of life of individuals being brought up in other foster homes with focus on its impact on inmate's personality.

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